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CPETERSON AND CWEST; INFOR FOR WHA/CAR JROSHOLT

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [KIRC](#)  
SUBJECT: PARAMARIBO AMERICAN CORNER SUSTAINING FUNDS 2009  
REQUEST

REF: SECSTATE 124399

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11. SUMMARY  
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(A) The American Corner (AC) continues to serve as a dynamic platform in launching Post's public diplomacy outreach activities. In 2008, Post noted a substantial 40% increase in the average number of attendees in direct proportion to the total number of program and non-program activities hosted at the American Corner.

(B) Post continues to build on the successes of two monthly outreach activities that premiered in 2007: the American Movie Night (held every fourth Thursday of the month) and the English Conversation Class (held every first Friday of the month). Numerous theme-specific activities were also hosted at the AC in addition to its regular monthly programs. Post is a non-PD presence post (NPP) with only one PD FSN Assistant and a USDH Pol/Econ Officer who could only dedicate an ordinate amount of time to public diplomacy. Despite the challenges Post faced, such as the major renovations at the Cultural Center of Suriname (AC's host institution) and resource constraints for PD programming, Post has nonetheless exceeded its expectations and aims to attract bigger audiences in 2009.

(C) Despite Paramaribo's status as a Non-Presence Post (NPP), public diplomacy is the highest priority (MSP #1 goal) in order to foster a more positive image and sustained goodwill, balance strong anti-Americanism, neutralize the influence of diplomatic missions from countries of concern, and promote understanding about U.S. policy, history, and society and culture. With very few resources at its disposal to launch effective public diplomacy campaigns, the American Corner remains Post's most valuable and efficient tool.

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12. AMERICAN CORNER OPERATIONS  
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(A) OVERVIEW

The American Corner is housed at the Cultural Center of Suriname (CCS), which plays host to some of the country's significant cultural events. Prior to the creation of the American Corner in 2005, the resources at the CCS were limited to a warren of meeting rooms and office spaces, a 400-seat capacity auditorium, and a rudimentary library that housed some three thousand volumes of dated books in Dutch. It was not a destination frequented by the city's residents, save for the sporadic cultural events at the auditorium.

The creation of the American Corner has reinvigorated public interest in CCS as the lead promoter of Suriname's cultural activities. "The American Corner has revitalized that

place," one local was quoted as saying in 2007 in reference to both the resources that the AC has brought and the several public diplomacy and outreach activities that the Embassy has hosted and/or co-sponsored with the CCS since 2005.

Inspired by the example of the American Corner, the director of the CCS has succeeded in negotiating for an HIV/AIDS Corner which has been fully operational since October 2008 following the completion of the renovation of the CCS building that was funded by the Dutch government. The CCS library now also boasts of a "kiddies corner" and a mod "internet cafe corner" that also displays and sells local arts and crafts. Moreover, the Dutch Embassy plans to consolidate their Dutch Cultural Center library into the renovated CCS.

The Dutch renovation of the CCS began in February 2007 with the roof and office space, which did not affect public spaces or U.S. Embassy programming at CCS. In 2008, renovation took place in the public areas, although rotating portions of the CCS remained open to the public throughout the renovation. The reopening ceremony was held in October 2008. The renovation of the CCS will draw more customers to the CCS facility, and will assist in the promotion of the American Corner as well.

The extensive renovation of the CCS restricted Post's opportunities in 2008 to utilize the American Corner as a venue for more frequent English classes, or the CCS compound in hosting big public diplomacy events, especially in the months between July and October 2008. During those months, the renovation took place in the main room through which American Corner users must transit and that Post often

utilizes when projected attendees for an event cannot be accommodated within the American Corner itself. Despite these temporary programming setbacks, the American Corner nonetheless continued to be a top crowd-drawer for its computers and free internet access, and for being the "repository" of the country's largest inventory of English books, magazines, periodicals, video, and other reference materials.

#### (B) LOCATION AND STAFFING

Located approximately one mile from the Embassy, the American Corner is on the second floor of the CCS, on one of the major streets of the nation's capital. Its prime location and ample public parking makes it an excellent alternative venue for public events that cannot be hosted within the Embassy grounds for security measures reasons. Embassy Paramaribo is a "lock and leave" Post without a Marine Guard Detachment, which hampers Post's ability to host any evening activities at the Embassy. The day-to-day management of the American Corner is run by two English-speaking CCS employees whose salaries are paid by the Surinamese government.

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13. DATA  
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#### (A) NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR

Non-program related visitors to American Corner in 2008: the sign-in book registered 500 visitors compared to the 750 approximate number in 2007. (Please see narrative below for frame of reference point)

#### (B) NUMBER OF PROGRAMS HELD

Between January and December 2008, the Embassy organized 23 programs at the American Corner. This number represents roughly sixty-five percent of the 35 programs that the Embassy hosted in the previous year, 2007, due to the constraints exacted by the major construction and renovation at the CCS. Although the number of programs was reduced in 2008, the American Corner was able to maintain a level of patronage that was proportionately higher than its previous

record. In 2007, average number of guests for each program was calculated at 34 compared to the 47 average number of guests per program in 2008.

(C) LIST OF PROGRAMS HELD

- "American Movie Night" (monthly program)
- English Conversation Class (6 classes in 2008)
- Black History Month events (6; Types of events: concerts/culture, workshops, movie, and book reading)
- Native American Indian Heritage Month (1; Type of event: audio-visual/culture presentation)
- Donation ceremony, materials for American Corner

(D) TOTAL ATTENDANCE AT PROGRAMS

Approximately 1,100. (Note: Suriname's total population is less than half a million, approximately 493,000, spread across ten districts.)

(E) MOST POPULAR PROGRAMS (By Category)

Thematic programming attracted the largest audience. Two Black History Month concerts that featured the Kelley Johnson Quartet and the Afro-Surinamese Drum Ensemble drew approximately 650 guests. American movie nights drew an average of 27 attendees per month.

(F) MOST POPULAR MATERIALS (By Category)

Computers and internet access remained the most popular resource at the American Corner, followed closely by books and periodicals. According to the American Corner Director and locally-engaged staff, the computers were used primarily for research purposes and in accessing non-immigrant U.S. visa applications. Novels, encyclopedias, and sports magazines were highly popular among the visitors.

(G) AUDIENCE REACHED

The 2008 programming at the American Corner catered to a diverse demographic that included students from secondary schools and colleges, professionals, children, retirees, and expatriates. Sector-specific programming on music and culture, education, and tourism, among others, drew target audiences.

(H) NUMBER OF EMBASSY OVERSIGHT VISITS TO AC (FSO AND FSN)

Embassy staff involved in PD activities visited the American Corner at least three times per month. Other non-PD Embassy staff members visited at least once a month.

(I) EXTENT OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF AC EVENTS

Most of the American Corner events received media coverage, the most extensive of which were the Kelley Johnson Quartet and the Afro-Surinamese Drum Ensemble performances in celebration of Black History Month. The American Movie Night continued to receive broadcast media promotion every month. (Note: The American Movie Night is promoted as a monthly cultural event rather than the promotion of specific films.)

(J) AMERICAN CORNER TRAINING PROVIDED

None in 2008. Both AC Director Marcella Augustuszoon and CCS Director Elviera Sandie, however, attended a 2007 training in Trinidad and Tobago under the auspices of the WHA/PDA Washington. (Note: Marcella is now Library Director and Acting AC Director until the Ministry of Education appoints a new AC Director. In the interim, two local CCS staff, in addition to Marcella, have been placed in rotation to assume the day-to-day management responsibilities.)

(K) HOW FY2008 FUNDING WAS APPLIED AND ITS IMPACT

FY08 funding enabled the Embassy to maintain the American

Corner as its integral arm for public diplomacy outreach. To the extent that the American Corner succeeded in sustaining its patronage level in the face of a significant reduction in the number of programs, the American Corner can be considered as the most efficient and effective tool in promoting pro-U.S. messages, reaching the widest array of audiences in an informal setting.

(L) AMOUNT OF GOE POST PROVIDED IN ADDITION TO SUSTAINING FUND

Post expended a total of \$3,202.66 out of the \$3,000 approved budget, or one-third of the original \$9900 Post-requested budget for 2008.

(M) AMOUNT OF PRIVATE DONATIONS PROVIDED

No private donations were received.

(N) PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: STRATEGY FOR IMPROVEMENT

Post has succeeded in "institutionalizing" the two regular monthly programs, American Movie Night and English Class, events that continue to draw steady patronage even as Post endeavors to widen its audience base through electronic mass mailings, movie flyers, and word-of-mouth marketing. Post has initiated an English Class for women parliamentarians and aims to pursue the offering of similar opportunities to non-English speaking members of the ladies diplomatic group and businesswomen. Post is currently working with the American Chamber of Commerce of Suriname to have its monthly breakfast meetings held at the area outside of the American Corner, in addition to plans of updating the AC's inventory of reference materials to include regular and current issues of "iconic" American publications like Time and Newsweek magazines, and the hosting of more education and tourism presentations at the American Corner. In October 2008, Post completed the repainting of the AC interior and the entrance to the AC, making the whole area outside of the AC more inviting and guest-friendly.

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14. BUDGET  
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(A) Post will continue to fund the internet, electricity, and other base costs as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding. In line with its 2009 goal of keeping the American Corner relevant, Post seeks modest maintenance funding for its public diplomacy outreach activities.

(B) Itemized Budget:

\$2500 - Wireless internet subscription and electricity  
\$1500 - Purchase of films and logistics (\$125/month)  
\$ 500 - Transport costs (students to/from English classes)  
\$2000 - Publicity, marketing, and program support  
\$2500 - Books, magazine subscriptions, audio-visual materials (note: all audio-visual materials in the AC are

still in the cassette tape/VHS formats. Post noted that the most "current" mainstream U.S. magazine in the AC is an October 2007 issue of Sports Illustrated), poster exhibits, and updated reference materials

\$9000 TOTAL

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15. CONFIRMATIONS  
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(A) MEMO OF UNDERSTANDING?

Yes.

(B) CENTRAL DATABASE COMPLETE AND UP TO DATE?

Yes, database is complete but needs to be updated once the Ministry of Education appoints Marcella Augustuszon's replacement as AC Director.

(C) COMPLIANT WITH CORE CHARACTERISTICS?

Yes. The American Corner is adequate in housing current inventory of materials and in holding small gatherings (maximum of 16 persons seated comfortably) but adjacent bigger rooms or the auditorium are often utilized to accommodate Post's steadily increasing programs and patronage.

SCHREIBER HUGHES